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BULLETIN OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

OCCASIONAL PAPERS No. 3

MORAL INSTRUCTION THROUGH SOCIAL
INTELLIGENCE

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SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

MARCH, 1913

ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER
AT THE POST OFFICE AT SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

1913

MORAL INSTRUCTION THROUGH SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

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Three great questions confront the educator, whether he be teacher or parent: First, what are the worthy incentives in American life? Second, which of these are strong enough to stimulate the best efforts of the boys and girls? Third, how can they best be utilized?

The history of education shows us that the most effective educational agencies have always utilized the great national enthusiasms, or the great religious forces, or both, in the education of the youth. The education of the ancient Hebrews was both national and religious. "The child was to become the faithful servant of Jehovah."¹ He learned through language and the personal example of his parents the religious and civic requirements of his nation. "Among all nations the direction impressed on education depends upon the idea which is formed of the perfect man."¹ For the Hebrew the perfect man was "the pious, virtuous man who is capable of attaining the ideal,"¹ "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy."¹ Children were taught and trained to have great respect for parents and teachers, and on the other hand much stress was placed upon the religious and moral fitness of parents and teachers. Mildness, patience, and unselfishness were recommended as their ruling virtues. All instruction must have its immediate issue in living. Precepts were turned into conduct. Instruction was vitalized with the religious and national life of the people. The persistence of this race through the centuries is due, in part, at least, to the efficiency of its education.

The Athenian youths of the historic period were conscious of certain well-defined social enthusiasms. The greatest of

¹ Compayré, *History of Pedagogy*, 7-8.

these was the civic enthusiasm. All of the boy's training emphasized citizenship. In his training in music he learned to chant patriotic poems. The simple and strong lyrics were taught the boys "that they might learn to be more gentle, harmonious, and rhythmical, and so more fitted for speech and action."² The man of social wisdom and action, Ulysses and Achilles in one, was their educational ideal. The good citizen was the speaker of words of wisdom and the doer of worthy deeds. Gymnastics was regulated with this in view. The "co-ordination of thought and actions, the fitting of conduct to precept, of word to action was to be secured through this training."³

But best of all the boys were led to appreciate the significance of their training. This was especially true of the ephebic period (the secondary education period of the Greeks), in which the youth was trained directly for citizenship. To make a successful career for himself in the service of the state was the one great ideal of the Athenian Greek of the historic period. Unlike the Spartan, however, the Athenian could serve his state in more ways than one. The careers of soldier, legislator, judge, executive, architect, sculptor, teacher, and athlete were encouraged and promoted by the state.

The state in large measure determined the careers open to its citizens. Their social enthusiasms or ideals were tangible, definite, and had their embodiment in the achievements of the Greeks then living. They held the heroes of their history in high esteem, yet their enthusiasm was not for a return to the past but for a fuller realization of the Golden Age of the present. They looked upon their institutions as fulfilments of a great past. Says Pericles in his famous funeral oration, "I would have you day by day fix your eyes upon the greatness of Athens, until you become filled with the love of her, and when you are impressed by the spectacle of her glory, reflect that this empire has been acquired by men who knew their duty and had the courage to do it," etc.⁴ The Athenian emphasis upon up-

² Graves, *A History of Education*, 162.

³ Monroe, *A Brief Course in the History of Education*, 45.

⁴ Monroe, *Source Book of the History of Education*, 29.

to-dateness in civic knowledge and insight is expressed by Pericles in this same oration. "An Athenian citizen does not neglect the state because he takes care of his own household: and even those of us who are engaged in business have a very fair idea of politics. We always regard a man who takes no interest in public affairs, not as a harmless, but as a useless character; and if few of us are originators, we are all sound judges of a policy. The great impediment to action is, in our opinion, not discussion, but the want of that knowledge which is gained by discussion preparatory to action."

The Athenians had strong social enthusiasms which were powerful factors in the moral education of the youth. This statement applies also to the education of the Roman youth in the time of the Republic, with the qualification that the Roman boy had fewer careers open to him and fewer opportunities for freedom of expression. Other examples of effective social enthusiasms utilized in moral instruction may be found in the education of chivalry in Europe and of Bushido in Japan. Every age and every nation has had its enthusiasms. Not all of these have been equally effective as forces for moral instruction.

The aim of the education of the Greeks was simple and definite and tended to produce a type of character. The complexity of modern life has made singleness of aim and the production of a type impossible. But this does not prevent a modern nation from making an effective use of its own forces for educational progress. The twentieth century, like the nineteenth, promises to be a period of increasing nationalization. The problems of nations will be internal—the problems of making peace with themselves rather than with each other. The fanatical national consciousness which holds in contempt everything foreign is being superseded by a more internal reflective consciousness directed toward domestic problems. The feeling that we need a national house-cleaning is rapidly gaining ground. That we may learn many useful matters concerning education, industry, and even municipal government from other nations without wrecking the Republic is being confidently admitted.

In this connection Paulsen, speaking for the German people, says: "The ideas of Fichte and Hegel foreshadowed what is now being realized. They saw in the state not merely an organization destined to secure national power or safety, but an institution intended to realize the moral idea."⁵

If the state is to realize the moral idea, it is plain that we must have a deeper and more extensive knowledge of present social affairs. The people generally must have a better grasp of the significance of their social activities. The problem is a difficult one, first, because of the complexity of modern society, and second, because of the unorganized condition of social activities. But the kind of education needed means precisely the mastery and simplification of the modern social complexity and the organization and control of social activities for ethical ends, and we have no right to shrink from the task because it is difficult. This kind of education can never be secured as a by-product from the study of many courses rich in many things except the institutions and forces of modern society. For a people whose golden age is yet to come, whose ideals are projected into the future, a system which omits or merely apologizes for present social conditions loses one great opportunity for moral instruction.

Moral insights are developed through present needs and motives. Instruction which does not arouse motives of social utility cannot have any direct effect upon conduct needed by society. Studies may result in forming habits of industry, quick and accurate thinking, acuteness of perception, vividness of imagination and memory, and yet leave motives of ethical conduct untouched. All of these disciplinary values become exceedingly important, however, in giving efficiency to ethical conduct, or, in other words, in realizing right motives in action. On the other hand, these disciplines may become equally effective in realizing wrong motives. To preform the child by establishing habits and attitudes, of course, is absolutely essential in the moral growth of the child, but present adjustments cannot be made on this basis alone. "Ultimate moral motives and

⁵ Paulsen, *German Education, Past and Present*, 178.

forces are nothing more or less than social *intelligence*—the power of observing and comprehending social situations—and *social power*—trained capacities of control—at work in the service of social interests and aims.”⁶ Nothing less than the possession of the knowledge and spirit of society as it now exists can give birth to effective motives—motives which in turn will give direction to habits and attitudes.

Negatively considered, all subjects viewed and studied as ends rather than as means are moral agencies. When my attention is occupied with the beauties of literature, with the theories of mathematics, with the engrossing interests of history, with the generalizations of science and philosophy, it cannot be directed at the same time to the satisfaction of my lower impulses and instincts. Truly the sum total of a man’s interests makes up his life. But one is only negatively virtuous who thus escapes from evil. It is only when the mind reflects upon subjects as means to an ulterior value that positive moral progress may be made. Whether progress or retrogression is actually accomplished depends upon the nature and the utility of that value. What we need is a race of educated men and women who can appreciate present values as well as the values of the past. We shall always need the values of the past to furnish a perspective for present values, but to ignore present values or to expect them to be realized incidentally, without studying the content inseparably connected with them, is to exist in the present and live in the past. The child appreciates certain values which seem to him to satisfy his individual needs. Moral instruction consists in elevating the child from his own plane of needs and values to the plane of society’s needs and values.

The *great problem* is to point the boys and girls to the tangible and at the same time to the good in the present. The desire for a career is fundamental in the life of every boy. This career and the life surrounding this career should be *idealized* before it is *actualized*. What can be done to realize this end? The lack of social knowledge and insight is not

⁶Dewey, *Moral Principles of Education*, 43.

limited to the uneducated, but exists among the educated as well. Many of the graduates of high schools and even colleges are apparently as helpless in this field as men whose education has been limited to the elementary school. Judge Lindsey has shown us how subtle and insinuating are the ways of the "beast." Good men apparently may innocently follow the beast almost to his den without becoming aware of the danger of their course. We see evidences on every hand of the need of social control. The political bosses and their henchmen rob the people for a number of years and then a new set of officials rides into power upon a strong tide of social feeling. Many of the officials of the new régime naturally prove inefficient; political feeling dies down; a state of general apathy ensues; and it is easy for the old professional guard to find their way into camp again. Municipal leagues and good government clubs are organized; some good work is done and then too late it is discovered that their Moses is losing them in the wilderness. The political shyster for a time keeps the company of good people, makes himself prominent in organizations of social service. He is found at church occupying a front pew, and sometimes he becomes the superintendent of a Sunday school. He is a veritable Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Occasionally the church succeeds in proving the identity of Dr. Jekyll and his name is erased from its membership roll. We can never effectually discover such men as this until we are trained to distinguish the real values of men from their fictitious values represented by their oral professions and social affiliations. Men of strong intellect and great moral worth possessing a rare insight in their specializations and a high degree of control in their vocations are often exceedingly childish in their civic and political judgments. We need a race of professional politicians, not a race of professional office-seekers. We can never hope to solve the great problems of the day successfully without systematically studying modern life.

The political developments of the last century have shown a constantly increasing effectiveness of public opinion in directing the affairs of our nation. Politicians good and bad

have been quick in "putting their ears to the ground," for the man who does not readily read the signs of the times can neither successfully serve nor rob his country. Sinners swim in the current of public opinion as well as the righteous servants of the people. They often swim more successfully in the eddies caused by conflicting currents. "The divisions and cross purposes of decent people give the sinner his chance to get away."⁷ Social progress in a democracy depends upon the efficacy of public opinion as well as the individual virtues of its citizens. Why should not the education of the schools seek to make a point of contact with public opinion? Professor Ross correctly diagnoses the case when he says: "Public opinion has become so mighty a regulator of conduct, not because it has grown wiser, but because of the greater ease of ascertaining, focusing, and directing it. There is nothing to indicate a gain in intelligence at all answering to its enlargement of authority."⁸ The politician ascertains public opinion and strives to focus and direct it. The educator's problem is to attempt to make intelligence measure up to the enlargement of the authority of public opinion—not intelligence in general, but the intelligence which constitutes the grounds for present-day civic and social judgments. "Today as in Hosea's time the people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."⁹ If the civic insight of the people could equal their civic intentions, the most vexing social evils would be eliminated in a generation. So much of moral effort and moral capacity go to waste because men do not clearly see the opportunities for social service. "The evils of the present industrial and political situation, on the ethical side, are not due so much to actual perverseness on the part of the individuals concerned nor to mere ignorance of what constitutes the ordinary virtues (such as honesty, industry, purity, etc.), as to inability to appreciate the social environment in which we live. It is tremendously complex and confused. Only a mind trained to grasp social situations, and to reduce them to their simpler and typical elements, can get sufficient hold on the realities of this life to see what sort of action, critical and constructive, it really de-

⁷ Ross, *Sin and Society*, 87.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

mands."¹⁰ The only remedy for this defect is more social education. It is said that the business of education is to follow and not lead in the progress of society. The correctness of this statement may be admitted, but one cannot find in it any reason why education should follow so far behind.

We study United States history, but rarely advance the class beyond the close of the Civil War and the problems of the reconstruction period. Since the Civil War this country has experienced a social and industrial revolution. This is left untouched in the instruction of our schools. The study of civics consists in a rather formal analysis of the Constitution (the Constitution which was, but is not now). The heroes of America held up to the children are great military men, statesmen, a few inventors, and authors. These are all good and will always be potent forces in forming American ideals, but the list should be revised. Nearly all of these, with the exception of Lincoln and perhaps one or two others, lived more than fifty years ago. Are there no living men and women whose deeds are worth considering? Are there no services being rendered in industry, charity, education, religion, professions, and labor worthy of study in our schools? The endeavors and achievements of the strong men and women of our time, who are working quietly yet heroically, very seldom find recognition in the daily newspapers. It is the business of the school to find these men and women and use their lives, endeavors, and achievements in the moral instruction of the young. This kind of instruction should not in any way take the place of the presentation of the great characters of history and religion, including Christ himself, but it should serve as a means of mediation between these great characters and the life of the child in the present.

If the religion of Christ is really accomplishing the salvation of the human race, and we believe that it is, then why should we forever return to ancient history for our saints? Our newspapers exploit the evil and the sensational in modern life. Our best magazines are engaged in a campaign of muck-

¹⁰ Dewey, *Ethical Principles Underlying Education*, 23.

raking. Let the muck-raking go on, but let us not forget that unless the boys and girls are introduced to the good in modern life, they will be poorly prepared to assume its responsibilities. Teach the life of Jesus, the apostles, and the saints of old: enthuse the student with fundamental religious emotions and high resolves, and then make this instruction efficient by showing definitely how the spirit of Christ is working through the lives and the activities of men and women now laboring for the salvation of humanity. Is there any better way to inspire and to enlist the moral and spiritual service of the rising generation? Every ethical occupation, calling, or profession has its opportunities for service as yet unrealized by the most of men. What are these opportunities? How are some men and women taking advantage of them? Teach the personal and the civic ideals of the Bible to the children, but bring these ideals home to them by thoroughly instructing them in the science and art of good living today. Empty precepts and abstract ethical terminology will not suffice. We must reveal history in its making to the child if he is to be successful in turn in making good history.

What can the school do to improve social morality? In the first place instructors must adapt and utilize the courses of study as they now stand to the end of moral instruction, and, in the second place, other more pertinent subject-matter for moral instruction must be introduced and adapted to the needs of pupils. The scope of this paper is limited to the second line of reform. Teachers who are dependent upon textbooks now being used in the schools cannot hope to accomplish much in solving the problem. What present social content can be used in instruction? How can the lives of worthy men and women be used in connection with such instruction? Is there any valid reason why boys and girls of our high schools should not study such great problems as the slums, the sweating system, tenements, individual and social degeneracy, the factory system, poverty, the unemployed and homeless poor, dependent children, social settlements, private and public charities, religious organizations, the juvenile court, industrial education, municipal gov-

ernment, immigration, the tramp problem, criminal classes, prison reform, institutions of charities and corrections, the liquor problem, labor unions, and the organization of capital, philanthropy, the institutional church, public and private education, political parties, etc.?

The writer is not unaware of several objections that will be made to such a course of study. The *first objection* will be that the subjects suggested emphasize the dark side of life. Superficially viewed, this contention seems true, but the emphasis will not be on a hopeless darkness. The high-school age is the period preparatory to full citizenship. This is the age when the social impulses of sympathy, sex, love, and heroism well up persistently in the lives of young men and women. It is the period of great resolves and exalted ideals. High ideals come in this period, if ever. Why should these resolves and ideals be emasculated by monopolizing the youth's school time on mental pabulum which has little if any connection with the great problems which are stirring the souls of the truly great men and women of our time? Does anyone know a social reformer or a public-spirited citizen who looks on the dark side of life or who is deteriorating to the plane of incurable pessimism?

A *second objection* will be that social prejudices are too strong to treat of topics so vital to the life of present-day society. But this objection really has no cogency, for all of the above topics and many others which might be added to the list have a common point of view in the enlightened public opinion of every community. Enlightened public opinion is the only local force by which the teacher should be guided in presenting such a course. The teacher must avoid any tendency to worship local or national heroes now living. Let men have due credit for their good deeds, but do not attempt to surround them with a halo. In presenting modern social content the emphasis should be placed upon the study of the results of service and the opportunities for service. The real teacher need not be afraid. There is no place for the dogmatizing type of teacher in this work. Its purpose must always be remedial for the future

rather than negatively critical of the present. Its spirit should be that of increasing sincerity and breadth of sympathy for humanity, an increasing sense of our social interdependence and obligations, and increasing desire for manly and womanly service. It is difficult to understand how prejudices can operate to the detriment of such instruction.

The *third objection* will be that the content is too difficult for pupils of high-school age, but investigation shows this objection to be untrue. The subjects above indicated are in themselves not more difficult of comprehension than the history and civics now being taught in the high schools. Of course there are some phases of some of these subjects that could not be grasped by the average high-school pupil, even in the fourth year, but this statement is equally true of the subjects of the present curriculum. The field is broad and rich, and there is ample opportunity for the appropriate selection of subject-matter. It will not be nearly so difficult to find social problems sufficiently simple as it will to find time enough to study even the most important ones.

The *fourth objection* will be that books and literature on these topics are unavailable. If it is meant that there are no textbooks treating these topics designed for use in the high schools, then the objection is true. But as a matter of fact there is an abundance of books, monographs, lectures, and magazine articles of a high order which may be selected and adapted to high-school work.

Still *another objection* will be that there is no time for such work in the high-school course. This objection must be met purely on the ground of relative values. If it is not clear that this work is more valuable than some of the work given in the high school, then of course there is no place or time for it, for the curriculum is sufficiently packed as it is.

When the soundness of the arguments for a more socialized curriculum has been admitted by laymen, still custom, tradition, and lethargy of the teaching craft reinforced by the ancient doctrine of formal discipline will bar the road to progress. The value of a subject does not consist in its "fixed inner structure

but in its function—in its power to start and direct significant inquiry and reflection.”¹¹ Anyone who has taught high-school classes in history and civics knows how keenly interested his pupils are in the problems of the present. The teacher who brings his course up to date feels that he is grappling with questions of vital importance to himself and to humanity, and he swings himself into his tasks with new zeal and increasing energy. Teachers fail to become great because they are not permitted to engage in the solution of the great problems of the day. As long as instruction is limited to the reproduction of the fixed sciences or to the investigation of subjects which have only a remote relationship to the present life of the race, so long will teachers continue to mark time in the march of progress. It would be a good discipline for teachers if they were required to think out a course of study without depending upon the safe and narrow paths of the textbooks. While we are emphasizing the values of the so-called fundamental subjects in the schools, the problems of the present are being solved by society for good or ill through the medium of a relatively unenlightened public opinion. The historians are strenuously trying to discover the hidden meanings of events which were passed into history through the medium of perhaps a still less enlightened public opinion. The results of this work are sifted and diluted and made into textbooks. If school historians will come to the point of throwing overboard a great many of the historical records as unworthy of occupying the best years of all students’ time, except those engaged in historical research, and will turn their attention to the problem of selecting those parts of history that *really are significant* in the life of society today, then history will begin to yield its real service. “History is vital or dead to the child according as it is or is not presented from the sociological standpoint. When treated simply as a record of what has passed and gone, it must be mechanical because the past, as the past, is remote. Simply as the past there is no motive for attending to it. The ethical value of history teaching will be measured by the extent to which past events

¹¹Dewey, *How We Think*, 39.

are made the means of understanding the present—affording insight into what make up the structure and workings of society today.”¹²

The spirit of the program of instruction here contemplated does not underestimate the value of the study of the great masterpieces and events of the past, but, on the contrary, history is given a new function, the function of social service. But knowledge of history can never be turned to account in the present unless the present is known. What is true of history in this respect is true of all the humanities and sciences. Ruskin has shown us how art is to be linked with the present for the service of society. This conception of studies is democratic.¹³ Education is a service and not an accomplishment which separates its possessor from his fellow-men. That kind of education which seeks to get a “corner” on culture and refinement, and only incidentally to serve, never can become a strong force in the ethics of our nation.

We must expand our conception of utility and elevate it from its present vulgar plane of existence. We live in an industrial age and all institutions are dominated by the industrial spirit and we cannot help it. The question is, what shall we do about it? We culturalites usually do one of two things: Either we allow the utilitarians to drag us down to their level or we withdraw and organize a monastic set of our own. The result is that both kinds of education tend to become artificial abstractions. Why cannot we admit that the utility men have a case and then help them to give scope and meaning to their subjects by making vital connections between the cultural and the industrial interests? Why should not the boys engaged in industrial training associate their labor with its industrial and social significance? Is not industrial history as cultural as the history of royal families and the escapades of princes? Would it not be well for the sons of the workers and the capitalists to gather during the school period some sane ideas on the history of trade unions and the organization of capital? Then in later

¹²Dewey, *Moral Principles of Education*, 30.

¹³Ruskin, *Lectures on Art*, secs. 116, 124, and in many other lectures.

years they could at least be held morally responsible for their acts. The effect of such instruction in providing motives, in creating the consciousness of needs, in arousing feeling, in preforming the mind with large and noble attitudes, and in stimulating the will cannot be overestimated. "Unless there is a prompt and almost instinctive sensitiveness to conditions to the ends and interests of others the intellectual side of judgment will not have proper material to work upon. Just as the material of knowledge is supplied through the senses, so the material of ethical knowledge is supplied by emotional responsiveness."¹⁴ Nothing so arouses the feelings and stimulates the will as the consciousness of the possibilities of personal participation; and the youth's consciousness of the possibilities of personal participation will be most effectively secured by studying the situation into which he must shortly enter. Thus the two essential conditions of moral education—stimulus for the will and exercise for the moral judgment—are amply provided for by instruction in modern social content.

¹⁴Dewey, *Moral Principles of Education*, 52.

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